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## ❖THE❖OLD❖TESTAMENT❖STUDENT.❖

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IN the statistics given in the January STUDENT touching the study of the Bible by pastors, it was stated that of those heard from not *one* had read the entire Old Testament in Hebrew. Since the publication of that statement, there have been received letters from several men,—one in Dakota, another in South Carolina, another in Michigan, and still another in Ireland,—who say that they have, with great profit to themselves, done this thing. A South Carolina pastor writes:—

“I respectfully submit my record as an instance of what a pastor *can* do if he is inclined. I have read the Old Testament in Hebrew *entirely* through. Many of the historical books, indeed most of them, I have read two or three times. Other books, such as the Minor Prophets, I have read *thoroughly*, comparing the Septuagint and Vulgate with the Hebrew. I read pen in hand, annotating, consulting commentaries, and writing out unknown words. I have tried to devote special attention to Biblical Theology and to Introduction. I have read most of the Apocrypha in Greek; the New Testament in Greek I have read fifteen or twenty times. I believe that a man who has done his duty in the college and seminary can gain a mastery of the Greek and Hebrew which will be more valuable to him than all the commentaries and works on theology put together. . . .”

A pastor's wife from Dakota thus writes concerning her husband's work:—

“We were both greatly surprised by the statement that, of one thousand ministers, not one had read the Old Testament through in the original; and while my husband's modesty on this point would perhaps prevent his writing the facts, I feel that you would be interested in knowing them. He completed the careful reading of both Old and New Testaments in the original languages in four years. The work was pursued under special difficulties, a large part of it while confined with his family in a sod shanty amid the rigors of a Minnesota winter. I know that he did the work conscientiously and faithfully, because his Hebrew Bible bears on every page the evidence of his labor. He often says that he would not exchange the benefits thus gained for his whole theological course. . . .”

ONE reason why American scholars, in some departments of science at least, must still sit at the feet of the Germans, is that

we have not yet learned the secret of independent research and original investigation. The Germans are no abler, nor are they more industrious. As regards industry, Americans are entitled to more credit than Germans. But the trouble is that, aside from our timidity, we are too often satisfied with second-hand work and second-hand authorities. Americans, for example, study commentaries on the Old Testament a great deal more than they study the Old Testament itself; they will read a dozen histories of New Testament times before thinking of Josephus or Philo or the Mishna. And yet true scholarship and truly scholarly methods of work consist in going back to the original sources of information and in drawing conclusions from the facts found there. How many students have ever made a really independent study of the Book of Genesis in the original, without placing themselves under the guidance of this or that commentary, or of this or that school of theology? Independent scholarship calls for just such a method. The object need not be to discover something in the book that no one else has found; nor does it imply the rejection of any help that the works of others may offer; it does, however, mean an independent study of the book from a healthy philological and theological stand-point. During the past years, there has been a great improvement in this regard, as can be seen from the fact that American scholarship, especially in the Old Testament department, is now being recognized and appreciated in Europe more than ever before. Americans are just as capable of doing first-rate work in the Old Testament field as are the men of any other nation. With clear ideas of the problems involved and correct methods of research, the scholarship and industry of America cannot but produce the best of results.

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THE Assyrian and its contributions to biblical science have not, from the start, enjoyed the welcome elsewhere that has been so heartily accorded them by American scholars. It is quite possible that the material which this study offered to biblical apologetics, made the Bible-loving conservatives in America too ready to accept as fact what was mere theory or hypothesis. In continental circles, and especially in Germany, the opinion prevailed in many places that biblical science had caught a tartar in Assyriology. In apologetics, history and philology its contributions were either rejected or looked upon with suspicion; and the regular Old Testament men did not trust the conclusions which the Assyriologists offered. For instance, Stade, in his *Zeitschrift*, has repeatedly ridiculed the claims of this

study; in Cornill's *Ezekiel*, the attempts of Fried. Delitzsch to show the Babylonian influence on the language of that prophet, is simply discarded as unworthy of further consideration; years ago the historian Gutschmidt contended with Schrader as to the real or fictitious historical data offered by Assyriology; and a multitude of other instances of this kind could be cited. It seems, however, that the persistent and more cautious efforts of the Assyriologists are beginning to be recognized and their results accepted by Old Testament men. Professor Kautzsch, of Tuebingen, than whom there is not a more candid man among the scholars of Germany, in a recent review of Delitzsch's "Prolegomena," in the *Theol. Literaturzeitung*, is one of the first to offer this recognition. He says, however, that Assyriologists themselves will now acknowledge that the slow reception of their earlier efforts was not without good reason. But on the other hand, he says, it is "unjustifiable stubbornness" at the present time to reject a point simply because it is offered by Assyriology; and valuable contributions from this source to the departments of history, chronology and etymology are continually being received. On the one hand, then, the Assyriologist is becoming more careful, and is not claiming that for which he has no reasonable proof; and on the other, the theologian is becoming willing to accept what seem to be well-established results of research in this department.

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IT may be that the renewed interest in the biblical languages is yet to have a most important bearing upon one of the leading practical church questions of the day, namely, the union of the evangelical denominations in faith and co-operation. This study has drawn men's attention and application again to the source of all creeds and confessions, the one Word of truth. It would be too sanguine a hope to expect, even with the decided inclination of the Christianity of our day toward mutual forbearance and earnest working together, that the closest Bible-study should bring all to see eye to eye the one truth which all denominations wish to express. But a thorough and unprejudiced Bible-study will certainly do something toward this end. Men will see less of what separates them from others, and more of the great fundamental truths underlying all revelation. The thorough and general prosecution of biblical theology upon the basis of a sound study of the scriptural languages, cannot fail to benefit the church at large as well as the individual.

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IT must not be thought that the peculiar views of the most advanced German Old Testament students are anything new, or that

they do not hold any relation to the general theological discussions in Germany. On the contrary, the leading thesis of this school (it may not be theoretically acknowledged, but it is the practical outcome of their hypotheses,—namely, the exclusion of the divine factor from religion) stands in the closest relationship with the predominating new rationalistic school of German theologians. The leading thesis of Ritschl's school of theology is that all metaphysics must be excluded from the construction of the system of doctrines taught in the Bible, i. e., from dogmatic theology. This is done, because, as their great teacher Kant has taught them, in regard to objects not perceived by the senses, we cannot know "a thing in itself," but only its appearance and expressions. Accordingly, all that is transcendental is excluded from the domain of theological discussion. From this basis, the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, the Atonement, and other fundamentals of Christian doctrine are simply eliminated from dogmatics. It is evident that rationalism, in this new garb, notwithstanding its assumed agnostic modesty, aims at a divorcement of the supernatural from Christian doctrine, and establishes its system upon the foundation of practical morality. With this general trend of negative theology, the new school of Old Testament scholars go hand-in-hand in spirit and aim. The latter is but one phase of the former. Both begin and end in a denial of the divine element in revelation.

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WE know of no better illustration of the fact that a reverent and, at the same time, strictly critical study of the Word of God brings to light new truths than Professor Briggs' new work on *Messianic Prophecy*. The author, it is true, is more willing than most American scholars to accept an historical readjustment of Old Testament books or portions of books. In his latest work, however, he does not go any farther than the general consensus of conservative specialists would warrant. As regards the Pentateuch, he does not even go so far, when one takes into consideration that, notwithstanding his acceptance of a documentary theory, he regards the statements of the Pentateuch as the correct expression of the Mosaic period. And yet, when he proceeds on the basis of this restatement of the historical order of the books of the Old Testament to develop their contents and their Messianic value, it is a constant surprise to see how luminous they become when set in an historical background from which they can be rationally developed.